

Take redistricting from Legislature, Munro says

By Neil Modie
P-I Reporter

Olympia — Taking congressional and legislative redistricting out of the hands of the Legislature would produce more competitive political races and “cleanse politics itself,” says Secretary of State Ralph Munro.

Munro Friday made public a proposed constitutional amendment and enabling legislation to take the responsibility for reapportionment away from the Legislature and give it to an eight-member, independent commission composed of an equal number of Democrats and Republicans.

The real value of the proposal, Munro said, would be “the ability of that commission to develop swing (congressional and legislative) districts rather than ‘safe’ districts” favoring the re-election of incumbents.

That would force political party leaders to recruit the best possible candidates for congressional and legislative offices, he said.

The secretary of state said at a news conference that he will ask the 1983 session of the Legislature to submit the constitutional amendment to the voters next fall. The commission’s first congressional and legislative redistricting assignments would come after the 1990 federal census.

Munro said he also has prepared legislation to tighten campaign finance and ethics laws, outlaw “exit polling” of voters as they leave polling places, expand use of voting by mail for single-issue and double-issue elections, extend publication



Ralph Munro, the secretary of state, wants to take redistricting out of the Legislature

of official voters’ pamphlets to local and primary elections, and ban counterfeit voters’ pamphlets.

A three-judge federal court panel has invalidated the Legislature’s 1982 congressional redistricting plan and ordered the Legislature to redraw congressional boundaries within 90 days after its 1983 session begins Jan. 10.

Munro has suggested that legislative leaders of both parties implement a section of the invalidated law by immediately appointing a three-member committee to modify the redistricting plan. The committee would then submit its recommendation to the Legislature for adoption as soon as the 1983 session begins.

Lawyers are uncertain, however, whether the committee can be appointed in light of the court ruling.

The invalidated law also had a section establishing a redistricting commission, but one that would leave final approval of reapportionment plans with the Legislature. Munro’s proposal would remove the Legislature from the process entirely.

The idea of taking redistricting duties away from the Legislature has been endorsed by both Senate

Majority Leader-designate R. Ted Bottiger and House Speaker-designate Wayne Ehlers, who will become the new leaders of the Legislature when Democrats take control of both houses next month.

Munro’s plan would have a redistricting commission hire a geographer to draw district boundaries and submit them to the commission, which would adopt a plan after public hearings.

On his campaign financing recommendations, Munro said he will seek legislation requiring reporting of anticipated campaign contributions of more than \$500 as soon as they are offered to a candidate or committee, and limiting to \$100 the amount of a cash contribution—as opposed to a check—that a candidate or committee may receive from any source.

He said he is urging the formation of a committee of citizens and legislators to propose legislation tightening campaign contribution and reporting laws. Although courts have invalidated attempts to limit the amount of money a contributor may give to a candidate or ballot proposition, Munro said the law could limit the amount a candidate or committee may receive from any one source.

“The capitol could be called the Bendix or the Maytag of the state for all the money that was “washed” here in the legislative races,” the secretary of state asserted.

He said that in the last couple of decades the cost of running for the state Senate has risen from \$10,000 to \$15,000 to as high as \$100,000.